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SILVER CLOUD

BY

W. W. GIBSON

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W. W. GIBSON



Condensed from "The Last Buffalo"



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Grey Eagle

In Chief Piapot's camp lived a warrior by the name of Grey Eagle, who was one of Piapot's right hand warriors and had fought with him in many tribal battles. Of the time I write, 1883, Grey Eagle was about fifty years of age. Yet he was as straight as a gun barrel. In his buckskin moccasins bedecked with beads of varied color, he walked about with the quiet nimble grace of a panther. He stood all of six feet in height and bore the sharp well-moulded features characteristic of the prairie Indians who roamed the western plains of Canada. But unlike most of the warriors of his age, he bore no visible scars of battle, and was a noble looking specimen of a red man to behold.

Before I continue further with the story of Grey Eagle I am going to tell of a tragic happening which befell Chief Piapot's band the first year we were their neighbors. I am also going to tell how plentiful wild game was in those pioneer days, and how I happened to play with so many of the Indian children of Chief Piapot's camp.

Fierce Indian Tribal Battles

Prior to the year 1874 the Blackfeet and Cree Indians were deadly enemies, continually at war with each other. As the tide of immigration began to flow over the western plains, the bison herds kept moving westward and were soon far beyond Cree hunting ground. This compelled the Cree Indians to invade Blackfoot territory to kill bison, and led to still fiercer battles between the two tribes.

But in the year 1874 the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police were established on the western plains of Canada. Through their endeavor law and order was soon brought to the country, and peace treaties were entered into between the Blackfeet and Cree Indians that never were broken. So in the Spring of 1876 Chief Piapot and his band of three hundred and

fifty souls left their homes on the head waters of the Qu Appelle River and marched three hundred miles to the Cypress Hills, which had been Blackfoot territory. It was there the last herds of bison roamed the western plains of Canada, and for a few years Chief Piapot and his band fared well.

But in the year 1880 the bison herds were getting scarce in Canada, and the red men no longer dined on the nice juicy buffalo steaks they and their forefathers had feasted on for centuries. But in the wooded ravines of the Cypress Hills were many elk and some grizzly bears, so Chief Piapot and his band still had plenty of fresh meat to eat. But in the Spring of 1883 the Canadian government compelled Piapot and his band to move on to a reservation ten miles southwest of the town of Wolseley, and about two miles from our homestead. In the Summer of 1883 while Piapot's band were cutting down poplar trees and building log cabins for shelter during the Winter months, my father, too, was building and driving nails into lumber, making a shelter to protect us from the chill frost of winter.

One day early in June, the Indians of Chief Piapot's camp heard the resounding blows of my father's hammer and came to see what it was all about. There were two of them. When my father saw them coming he jumped down off the roof of the building, and ran into our tent and filled his pockets with shotgun shells, then brought forth his double barreled shotgun and set it aside on the roof where he was working. Our dog Dona, which we brought from Scotland, did not seem to like the Indians, for he sprang at one of them, and tore a hole in his blanket. To show that we wanted to be friendly my mother made them a pot of black tea. And gave each of them a well buttered Scotch scone, which they seemed to relish. That was our first visit from the Indians of Chief Piapot's camp. I remember the stocks of their long single barreled flint lock rifles were densely studded with brass tacks. Their powder flasks were made from large buffalo horns, and their bullet pouches of buckskin, decorated with beads.

But late in the Fall of 1883 a deadly epidemic broke out in Chief

Piapot's camp. Ere the snows of Winter had disappeared, one hundred and thirty of his band perished of the malady.

Many a time when herding my father's flocks on the reservation I passed by aspen groves where there were dozens of platforms lashed to poplar trees with rawhide thongs, sepulchres that bore mute evidence of that tragic Winter.

Chief Piapot placed the blame of the epidemic squarely on the shoulders of the Canadian government. He said the government had lured his people away from the Cypress Hills with the promise of plenty of fresh rations of meat during the Winter months, but the only rations they received was that of rancid bacon, which the Indians had never been accustomed to eat.

It was one day late in the Summer of 1884 Chief Piapot held council with his warriors and told them he was not going to stay another Winter on the government reservation. He knew of a favored spot in the Qu Appelle Valley about one hundred miles away where he had hunted and killed many bison when a young warrior. He said there were still many deer in the ravines that led into the valley and there was running water and large lakes nearby, that swarmed with wild ducks and geese during the summer.

So in the early Fall of 1884 Chief Piapot set forth with his band to occupy the favored spot he knew about in the valley of the Qu Appelle. But they had just made half the journey when the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police got wind of their movement and intercepted them ten miles north of Fort Qu Appelle. The Mounties told them they could go no farther and would have to return to the government reservation. Piapot told them he was leading his people to a place where they would get plenty of good food during the Winter. The Mounties told him the government would provide them with food. Piapot said he did not want the government food, they had furnished his people with rations of rancid bacon the previous Winter that killed one hundred and thirty of his people, and he would not turn back. That was once the Canadian Mounties did not stop

their man, for Piapot continued the journey to his favored spot in the valley of the Qu Appelle. And to this very day his people dwell in the place he chose for them over sixty years ago. His bones rest on a beautiful knoll overlooking the valley of the Qu Appelle, where he hunted and killed hundreds of bison, when a young warrior.

Wild Game Plentiful

Our homestead was on the border between the woodland and prairie, a little over two miles from Chief Piapot's camp. We were their nearest white neighbor. The country between our homestead and their camp was thickly wooded with aspen groves and willow clumps, and dotted with hundreds of small lakes and ponds, which were encircled with bull rushes and brimful of water. During the Summer they were black with wild ducks. Many a time I have seen Chief Piapot's warriors kill five or six mallards with one shot as the ducks started to swim out from the edge of the rushes. During the month of May when the wild ducks and geese were migrating one could gaze at the Heavens any time and see continuous flocks winging their way to the far north. And when migration was at its height the very sky was darkened by their flight. The ponds were also dotted with muskrat nests, and around sunset one could see hundreds of them swimming about on the lakes. The pioneers shot them so as to get their pelts to make Winter caps and mittens.

The aspen groves inter-woven with willows and wild berry bushes swarmed with bush rabbits and so plentiful the pioneers would start out with a bobsled after the cold weather set in, and during the day's hunt fill a wagon box full of rabbits. In the years 1883 and 1884 I was fed so much rabbit stew I was prancing about like a rabbit.

Throughout the same woodlands prairie chickens swarmed in thousands. In the Fall of the year when the limbs of the aspen were dazzling with hoar frost, was when the prairie chickens loved to perch on the highest

limbs of the aspen, and blink their eyes at the morning sun. I have seen them perched among the branches so numerous they resembled blackbirds and within gunshot of our house. They also swarmed among the wheat and straw stacks, and at times so closely clustered I once saw my elder brother John kill thirteen with one shot. One did not have to travel far to kill game in those pioneer days. Quite often it came of its own accord. Among the aspen groves fantail partridge were plentiful, and so tame one could almost kill them with a stick. The woods also abounded with both deer and antelope. When romping about with the Indian children I saw many elk horns lying around. They told me the Assinaboine Indians had killed most of them when the bison became scarce two years prior to our arrival.

The country was then a hunter's paradise, but there were no game restrictions in those pioneer days. The White settlers were killing game both Summer and Winter that rightfully belonged to the Indians. Through the unrestricted slaughter, in less than three years the noble red men were on the verge of starvation.

Playing with the Indian Children

During the first three years of our habitation on the prairie wilderness the Canadian government had not yet established a school in our district. It was during those three years that I was running wild and played a great deal with the Indian children of Chief Piapot's band, who were encamped about our homestead during the Summer months.

In the years 1883 and 1884 the white settlers were widely scattered. The nearest white children I could play with were the Fergusons, who lived three miles to the east. The only means of transportation those early Scotch pioneers had was ox team and wagon, so it was seldom I had the privilege and pleasure of playing with the Ferguson children. And it was but natural that I should want to play with the many Indian children who encamped upon our homestead from time to time.

During the Summer months when my father was busy breaking virgin soil or cutting wild hay with scythe to feed our livestock during the Winter, my mother carried on considerable barter with many of Chief Piapot's warriors, exchanging gun powder and shot for wild ducks. The exchange was six large mallards or eight of medium size for a large cup of gun powder and a Scotch teapot of shot.

Of the many Indians who encamped upon our homestead, few of them remained much longer than two weeks at a time. And of the many Indian children with whom I played not one of them could speak a word of English. Yet by the time they were ready to break camp, many of them had learned to speak a few words of Scotch and English which I had taught them.

But Grey Eagle seemed to possess a fondness for a bowery spot upon our homestead by the edge of a small lake, for he camped there during the months of June and July, the two seasons of Chief Piapot's domicile on the Wolseley reservation. And with Grey Eagle, my mother carried on a great deal of barter for wild ducks.

White Wing

Grey Eagle was the father of an Indian boy named White Wing. He was just about my age and size, and a very good Indian boy. I first met White Wing one day when he came to our place with his father, who was going to exchange some wild ducks with my mother for gun powder and shot. Like all the rest of the Indian boys, White Wing could not speak a word of English. So the first day we met he and I just smiled at each other. But the next day he came to our house alone, and we played several hours. The first few days our understanding was through signs. But in a very short time we were able to understand each other, and White Wing soon learned to speak a language of broken Scotch.

Like his father, White Wing was trim of limb and a fast runner. He

could out-distance me by a good margin. Yet I could beat him at both running and standing high-jump. Not only White Wing but also all of the other Indian boys of my size who competed. As a result of my ability to out-jump them, they called me "Pale Face Jumping Deer."

White Wing and I played a great deal together and we became very good friends. My first business transaction was with him. He agreed to make me a bow and two arrows in exchange for my jackknife. That transaction led to a closer friendship between us.

Silver Cloud

Grey Eagle was also the father of an Indian maiden named Silver Cloud. She was eighteen months older than I, and the most beautiful Indian maiden I ever beheld. How often one sees, when traveling over field and through forest, where nature has lingered to bestow a special blessing upon some favored creation. She dealt generously with Silver Cloud. For her very countenance revealed character and intellect of distinguished quality. There was a softness in her large expressive eyes that bespoke kindness. When she smiled dimples on her shapely face deepened and her beautiful white teeth gleamed like pearls between lips that blended with the red rose that nestled in her dark hair, which reached almost to her knees, and was of much finer texture than that of the other Indian maidens I had seen about. She was clean and neat in appearance. And there was striking contrast between her garments and those of the other Indian maidens. Their garments were usually made out of Hudson Bay blankets fringed about the shoulders and down the outer side of the sleeves, but with few other trimmings. Silver Cloud was a very industrious maiden and excelled in the art of needlecraft, modeling her garments to suit her own taste. Her outer garments were of buckskin, but of two colors, cream and brown. The greater portion was of brown. The yoke on her blouse was V shape with a border around the edge composed of two strips of cream colored buckskin one inch

wide. These were spaced two inches apart. Between the two strips she inserted diagonal squares of cream buckskin. On the center of each square she sewed a brown buckskin dot about one half inch in diameter. Brown dots of the same size were spaced about three inches apart around the two strips that formed the outer edge of the yoke. The same design was wrought around the bottom of the blouse and on the cuffs of the sleeves, but the cuff pattern was only half the size of that around the yoke and blouse. The same design was also wrought around the bottom of the skirt, but there were two rows of the diagonal squares staggered with a third buckskin strip between the two. On the front of her blouse she wrought beautiful designs of flowers in colored beads. The shoulders and outer seams of the sleeves of her blouse were adorned with a mixture of cream and brown buckskin fringes, about two inches long, and both sides of the skirt were decorated in the same manner. The outer side of her buckskin leggings were also fringed and decorated with beaded flowers, but of much smaller design than that on her blouse and skirt. She wore a necklace of shells and when wild flowers were in bloom she always wore a red rose in her hair. In her moccasins bedecked with beads of varied color that blended with the beautiful shades of her costume, she walked about with gentle grace befitting a queen.

Meeting Silver Cloud

In a previous chapter I told where I had entered into an agreement with White Wing to make me a bow and two arrows in exchange for my jackknife. I was anxious to learn the art of bow making so that I could make my own bows and arrows, and asked White Wing if I might watch him while he was working on them. He said I could but he always made them at their camp fire in the evening, as he required the fire to toughen the fibre of the wood and shape the bow. Before I could trade away my jackknife to White Wing I had to get my father's consent, so I asked him if I might go to Grey Eagle's camp and watch White Wing while he

worked on my bow and arrows. At first my father was reluctant but finally softened and said I could go if I did not stay too late.

When I arrived at Grey Eagle's tepee White Wing was sitting by their camp fire removing bark from a wild cherry sapling, out of which he was going to fashion my bow.

While I was standing watching him I noticed a beautiful Indian maiden sitting in the portal of their tepee. She was busy sewing beads on moccasins. But when she saw me approach she laid aside her work, then rose and walked into the tepee but soon returned carrying a buckskin mat. She walked over to the camp fire and placed it along side of White Wing, who beckoned me to sit down. It was then he told me she was his sister and her name was Silver Cloud. While I sat watching White Wing shape my bow, I cast many glances towards Silver Cloud, and each time I did, I noticed she was watching me very keenly and soon my glances were greeted with gracious smiles.

As the silent shades of night began to deepen, flickering gleams of the camp fire broke through the dark shadows of the tepee. As they danced and fell upon her, she looked like a beautiful princess. 'Twas then I felt the first bud of innocent romance sprout within my little breast. When I rose to depart and walked past their tepee, she stood in the portal and smiled sweetly, then waved her hand. The next day when White Wing came to play with me he told me Silver Cloud said she liked me and that I was her Brave.

Silver Cloud, like White Wing, knew not a word of English, and when I sat by their camp fire in the evening watching White Wing shape my bow and arrows, Silver Cloud would point to different articles and ask what their name was in English. By this method it was surprising how quickly she learned the mongrel language of Scotch and English which I taught her.

A Hunting Expedition

On the fifth evening White Wing completed my bow and two arrows, and I gave him possession of my jackknife. He told me about a lake not far from Chief Piapot's camp where there were many snipes running along the edge of the water, and if I could get away he would take me there and teach me how to shoot with my new bow. So we planned to leave the next morning.

To this day that lake is called Piapot's lake and twelve years later the municipality of Wolseley let my father a contract to plow a fire-guard a distance of five miles between the Indian reservation and the surveyed sections to the east. It fell my lot to plow that fire-guard and I plowed through the center of Piapot's lake. It had dried up completely. I remember the point of my plowshare struck a large red willow root near the center of the lake, which is positive proof that at one time there had been a long period of constant drought on the prairie.

Early next morning, Silver Cloud, White Wing and I started on our trip to Piapot's lake. We did not spend any time hunting on the way but traveled fast because I was making the trip unknown to my father and mother, and wanted to get home before dinner. My brother Jim and I had stolen away from home about two weeks prior to visit and play with the Ferguson boys, who lived three miles to the east. On our way home we found a pond with many wild young ducks, and took off our shoes and stockings to wade in the water to catch some of them, but we tarried there a little too long. My father got alarmed when we did not appear for dinner and set forth in search of us, finding us with several young ducks about two miles from home. That night before going to bed we both got a thorough thrashing, so I was still mindful of that trip and wanted to get home early.

When we reached Piapot's lake White Wing said the Indians had been shooting early that morning because the ducks were well out from the rushes towards the center of the lake and far beyond the range of shotguns. There were thousands of them and many different kinds. Also some wild

geese. We hunted around the edge of the lake for about three hours and during that time White Wing shot five snipe. I was not yet proficient with the bow and arrow and was unable to shoot any. White Wing gave me several instructions and I was shooting closer at the end of the hunt. That day we kept Silver Cloud busy hunting for and finding our arrows among the tall grass. She seemed to have keener instinct for finding arrows than White Wing. Quite often he and I would be searching among the tall grass and scrub when Silver Cloud would come along and find them in a few minutes. When she found my arrows she always placed them by the red rose she wore in her hair and carried them there until I was ready to use them. That afternoon we got home early and no one knew we had been to Piapot's lake.

Another Trip to Piapot's Lake

Two weeks later White Wing and I planned to make another trip to Piapot's lake, but Silver Cloud was unable to go with us. She had to stay at home for several days to help her mother pick wild berries.

So one morning after breakfast White Wing and I started on our second trip to the lake—but this time we never reached it. We went by way of Piapot's camp, which was half a mile north of the lake. When we arrived at Piapot's camp there were many Indian boys playing about. A few of them had never seen a pale face boy before, and I was rather a curiosity to some of them. White Wing told them I was his friend and my name was Jumping Deer.

The boys were playing with willow wands about two feet long. They stuck a ball of tough clay on the end of the wand about the size of a hen's egg, swung it back over their head then sent it forward swiftly. The clay left the end of the wand and flew through the air. Some of the boys could send the clay ball over one hundred yards. After awhile we started shooting at targets with our bows. Many of the boys could outshoot White Wing. One Indian boy about his size brought forth a buffalo horn and filled it

full of clay they had been using on the wands. He set it on a rock at a distance of about seventy feet, then we all started shooting at it, but many of us missed the horn. The boy who set it up never failed to send his arrow into the mud he stuffed into the base.

After shooting awhile with our bows we started running. The distance was one hundred yards, and only once did White Wing fail to reach the goal foremost. We finished the day's play by jumping and that day I nearly lost my crown to a tall Indian boy, and had to take off my shoes before I could beat him. White and I played so long with the Indian boys we had no time to go to the lake and shoot snipe. That was the last time I mingled with the Indians of Chief Piapot's camp until twenty years later.

Playing with Silver Cloud

My two elder brothers noticed I was playing a great deal with Silver Cloud and began teasing me. Like most boys of my age I did not like to be teased. So one day I told her I did not want to play with her any more while my brothers were around. As Silver Cloud was eighteen months older than I, quite often she took the lead in our many various affairs, and at times treated me with motherly tenderness. When we hunted and played around the ponds sometimes I got my feet wet. She always insisted that I take off my shoes; then she would wring my stockings and hang them on a willow bush to dry in the sun. When I told her I did not want to play with her any more while my brothers were about, her beautiful eyes drooped with disappointment, but soon they brightened with a sweet smile, for she was endowed with very keen instinct and intuition characteristic of womanhood, a far finer and keener sense than manhood is possessed of. And these finer qualities fair nature so wisely bestowed upon our gentler sex, have always prevailed, and ever will prevail towards the uplifting and betterment of the human race. Silver Cloud said she would return when my brothers went back to work where they were raking and coiling hay in a slough about a mile from home.

Teaching the Call of the Prairie Chicken

When Silver Cloud returned she said she was going to teach me a call, and when she heard my signal she would come and play with me. The call she chose was that of the prairie chicken, the plaintive call of the lost signaling to join their flock. Our signal consisted of five calls with timed intervals. Our first call was single with a five space interval. Between it and the second call, that is the time it took one to take five steps. The second call was three straight calls without interval, and the last signal the same as the first. Then single calls every fifty paces when locating each other in the wood.s

In those pioneer days prairie chickens were so plentiful one could hear them calling almost any time during the day, so that is the reason we had to have a distinct signal, and it was also confusing to my brothers for they did not become suspicious. After teaching me for several hours Silver Cloud said I had learned the call perfectly.

A Proficient Teacher

It was not long until I found that Silver Cloud was a capable instructor at teaching the plaintive call of the lost prairie chicken. It was one day my mother told me to take a bucket and go to the woods and pick her some saskatoons. When I reached the thicket where the berries grew I sent Silver Cloud our signal. But I got no response and after sending several calls I knew she was not at the tepee and beyond the sound of my voice, so I started to pick berries alone, but had just got nicely started when to my surprise I saw Grey Eagle through the thicket not more than fifty yards away. He was stalking through the wild pea vine that fringed the edge of the woods, his long single barreled muzzle-loading shotgun against his shoulder ready to shoot at the prairie chickens when they flew.

Berry Picking

One day near the end of July my mother told me to go to the woods and pick her some wild cherries. Grey Eagle and his family were always encamped upon our homestead during the berry picking season. So I sent Silver Cloud our signal, for I liked to have her with me when I went berry picking, because she always insisted that I hunted with my bow or climbed trees while she picked the berries for me. I used to feel ashamed when I took them home to my mother, for she always praised me for picking so many and keeping them clean and free of stems and leaves.

Singing Heaven vs. Happy Hunting Ground

It was on that berry picking trip that Silver Cloud and I were drawn into a discussion about our Heavens. It started when she tried to reach a tall cherry bush loaded with very large cherries that were beyond her reach. So I climbed up and held the top down while she picked the cherries off. It was then she told me wild cherries and saskatoons grew the size of large goose eggs in her Happy Hunting Ground. I then asked her what her Happy Hunting Ground looked like. She told me there was no night there. Neither were there clouds or rain; the Heavens were always bright and had two suns; as one rose in the east the other sank in the west. And the mountain peaks were covered with beautiful emerald moss soft as down and embellished with sweet scented flowers that were white as snow. The waters of the lakes and rivers were crystal clear, and the shores of the lakes were covered with golden sands that were fringed with beautiful flowering rushes. Among the rushes sang countless birds with plummage of lovely color. And while they lilted their sweet notes magic echoes rose to the Heavens and when they reached the mountain peaks fell on the flowery moss, then turned to water, and it dripped through the moss and trickled off to join the brooklets and the brooklets sang and danced to the canyons and the canyons shouted and leaped to the rivers and the rivers murmured

soft music to the lakes and the ripples of the lakes lapped the golden sands and blended their soft music to the magic song of the birds. And when the suns gleamed east and west casting their golden rays upon the flowery rushes that bordered the lakes, silver trout and fishes of the waters danced and splashed and skipped about, to the music of the lovely birds as they sent forth their magic notes. And on her Happy Hunting Ground were green meadows where countless herds of bison roamed. As they browsed near the haunts of waterfowl, wild ducks and geese rose like clouds and swarmed the Heavens. And beside the brown bison there were black and white ones. Her father told her the gravy of the white buffalo tasted far better than the pale face's fire water.

My Singing Heaven

When Silver Cloud finished picking all the large cherries off the tree I sprang to the ground and let it swing back. Then she asked me what my Happy Hunting Ground looked like. I told her I did not have a Happy Hunting Ground, I had a Singing Heaven and it had beautiful golden streets and a golden gate, inlaid with pearls that were far nicer than the shells of her necklace. And there were golden stairs that led to the golden gate. Inside the golden gate was a great white throne, and around it were placed countless golden chairs where the good people sat and sang melodious hymns of praise, while angels hovered above playing sweet music on their beautiful golden harps. Then she wanted to know what angels were. I told her they were children who had been extra good on this earth, and when they died and reached Heaven, two golden wings were fastened to their shoulders so that they could fly around the great white throne, and hover over the golden chairs where the good people sat. And while the good people sang their melodious hymns of praise to God, silvery sweetness of the golden harps blended harmonious notes with the songs of the blest, and the Heavens rang with great joy.

While I told the story of my Singing Heaven, Silver Cloud listened

with great interest. She picked some large leaves from a bush, then spread them over the cherries and set the pail to one side in the shade of a willow clump then sat down upon a dead tree, and asked me if there were any buffaloes at my Singing Heaven. I told her there were no wild animals, but I thought there might be a few good dogs, I knew my dog Dona would be there, because I prayed for him every night. Then she asked me if she could go to my Singing Heaven. I told her that only good people were allowed to enter through the golden gate of my Singing Heaven, but I thought she might be able to get there, if she were good, and said her prayers every night. Then she wanted to know how good she would have to be, and how she could reach the golden gate of my Singing Heaven.

Her first question I had often asked myself in childhood and could not answer. But I told her when she died, somehow she would land at the foot of the golden stair, and would start to climb the golden steps, but would only go a short distance when an old man with a long grey beard, and dressed in a flowing white robe, would appear sitting on a golden chair at the entrance to the golden gate. On a golden table by his side she would see a great book bound in gold, its pages white as snow. When she approached the old gentleman, he would ask her name and when she told it, the great book would open, and if there was no blot found on the snow white page where her name was written, the old gentleman would smile and the golden gate would start to lift, then she would hear great rejoicing coming from the good people who sat around the great white throne. When the golden gate opened wide, angels would hover above playing sweet music on their beautiful golden harps. And while the good people sang their melodious hymns of praise, silvery strains of the golden harps would blend their mellow tones in sweet accord, and the Heavens would be filled with great rejoicing and resound of glory to God. When she walked beneath the golden arch that led into Heaven, she would see three angels standing nearby, two of them holding golden wings, and one a beautiful golden harp. When the Heavenly gate closed they would approach and fasten the golden wings to her shoulders, place the golden harp in her hands, and she too would soar above and play sweet music on her beautiful golden harp for ever and ever.

When I told her these things, her beautiful eyes gleamed with wonder and I knew she was delighted with my Singing Heaven.

Then I told her if there happened to be a blot on the white page of the great book where her name was written, a heavy iron gate at the left hand side of the golden gate would start to open, and when it moved its great hinges would creak and groan, and the old gentleman with the long grey beard would look sour, and point his finger at her, and then at the dark opening through the gateway. When she entered a grimy angel with wings shaped like a bat would snatch her and fly down a deep dark pit, and when they reached the bottom she would see a dreadful sight, a seething lake of fire and as far as the eye could see, countless thousands of people plunging in it, all of them shrieking, weeping, wailing, and gnashing their teeth in dreadful torment, some of them pleading for just one drop of water to cool their parched tongue. While she gazed at the horrible sight, fumes from the molten fire would make her sneeze, and when she sneezed another black iron gate at the bottom of the deep pit would open. From the dark portal an ugly man grimy with soot and bearing a great spear in his hand would step forth, his beastly head and feet horned and hoofed like that of a bison, and a peculiar shaped tail, barbed at the end like the head of an arrow. When he saw her standing by the edge of the fiery lake, smoke and fire would spout out of his mouth and nostrils, and a cruel grin would pass over his frightful face, disclosing four ugly white tusks. With a single leap he would pounce upon her, and thrust his great spear into her side, then toss her into the seething lake of fire, where she too would sizzle and scream for ever and ever.

A Change of Heart

When I told her about the fiendish torment of the imaginary place, the expression of wonder on her beautiful countenance changed to that of fear and horror. She pushed the heels of her beaded moccasins deep into the dead leaves that lay along side of the tree, tossed back her little head and said that she did not want to go to my Singing Heaven. There was no horned evil Spirit with a barbed tail, nor a burning lake of fire near her

Happy Hunting Ground, everything there was so green nothing could burn. And when the Indians died they all went to the Happy Hunting Ground, not just a few like my Singing Heaven. But when they reached their Happy Hunting Ground they were all good Indians and did not fight with each other any more. They hunted bison on the green meadows, deer and bear through the forest and fished in the lakes and rivers. And that was far more fun than sitting on golden chairs singing all the while. She said she would sooner sit on the green grass among the flowers of her Happy Hunting Ground than on the hard golden chairs of my Singing Heaven. The golden harps of my Singing Heaven might play nice sweet music, but she would far rather stroll by the flowering rushes that grew around the lakes of her Happy Hunting Ground and listen to the music of the beautiful colored birds lilting their sweet songs and sending forth magic notes that rose to the Heavens, then fell on mountain peaks and changed to water.

And she knew I would like her Happy Hunting Ground because I could romp through the woods and hunt wild game with my bow and arrows and play in the golden sands of the lakes and rivers. But if I went to my Singing Heaven they might send me down the deep dark hole and toss me into the burning lake. Then I would wish I had gone to her Happy Hunting Ground. And even if they did happen to fasten golden wings to my shoulders and give me a golden harp to play, she knew I would soon get tired of them and wish I was romping through the woods snaring rabbits or shooting gophers with my bow.

Embracing Silver Cloud's Faith

Long ere Silver Cloud was through extolling the wonders of her Happy Hunting Ground, I was wishing I had been born a papoose instead of a white baby. And when she told me there was no horned evil spirit with an arrow head tail, nor a seething lake of fire near her Happy Hunting Ground, and everything was so green nothing could burn, I was eager and ready to embrace her faith, and told her I would like to go to her Happy Hunting Ground. For the fear of a burning Hell had been seared deep into my very being and filled my tender mind with a horror that saddened the

joy of childhood. But Silver Cloud said her father told her that palefaces could not go to the Indians Happy Hunting Ground because they destroyed too many bison, but she was sure I could go because I liked to hunt with bow and arrow and she was going to ask her father about it.

A Surprise Call

It was the time when fields are shorn and nature's robes are tinged with red and gold of Indian Summer, tree and bush seemed to rival in splendor as they awaited the wailing blast of bleak Autumn winds to toss their faded robes into the lap of the forest.

I had just filled my mother's wood box and was gathering kindling when I hear Silver Cloud's call. I was surprised for it was at a season the Indians did not encamp about our homestead. I listened for the second call before responding and when it came I responded and proceeded through the woods to locate her and found her concealed in the midst of a willow clump. When I approached I knew something was disturbing her for she did not greet me with her usual smile and her large eyes looked sad. When I drew near she clasped my hand firmly and told me that Chief Piapot had just held council with his warriors and told them he was not going to stay another Winter on the government reservation. They would break camp in a few days and leave for a favored spot he knew of in the valley of the Qu Appelle about one hundred miles away. She said she was afraid I too would move away and she would never see me again.

I told her our tepee was made of stone and we could not move it and that I would always be there and we would see each other again. That assurance seemed to calm her emotion, for her face brightened with a sweet smile.

Then she told me the Indians were glad Chief Piapot was making the change, and they all knew he was being guided by the Great Spirit. For many a time when overwhelmed by greater numbers of Blackfoot warriors in battle, he always brought most of his braves safely through the struggle. He told them the white settlers were killing so many of the bush rabbits,

soon there would be none left for the Indians to shoot, then they would starve; for they would never again partake or eat of the rancid bacon the government supplied, for it had caused so many of their dear friends to take such early flight to the Happy Hunting Ground.

She said the valley Chief Piapot was taking them to, had moving water and the duck ponds did not dry up like the ones on the government reservation. In the ravines of the valley were many deer and prairie chickens, and there were large lakes near by that swarmed with ducks and geese and full of fish, but the Indians did not care very much about the fish unless deer and prairie chickens became scarce during the Winter, then they could break a hole through the ice and spear the fish.

Chief Piapot told them, before the Hudson Bay Company built their fort at Qu Apelle, the valley swarmed with bison during the Summer and many stayed there all Winter. He said one dry season when he was a small boy most of the upland lakes went dry. That Summer the bison swarmed in such herds to drink the waters of the Qu Appelle, thousands of young calves were crushed to death.

While I conversed with Silver Cloud she was still breathing heavily and told me she ran most of the way from the reservation, which was two and a half miles.

After resting a few minutes she started back and I accompanied her part of the way and would have gone all the distance but she was afraid I would not get home in time for dinner, and was well aware what would happen if I was late.

After walking over half the distance to the reservation, we sat by the edge of an aspen grove to rest before returning to our homes. As the flickering rays of the evening sun broke through the trembling leaves of the aspen, silent wings of ceaseless time drew near to part us. She placed her arm upon my shoulder and pointing at the sinking sun, said "Sure as it will rise again in the east I will come back to you. The moon will chase it many, many times and the gentle breath of Spring will blow, and whisper love to the naked forest, soon the gaping buds will sprout and send forth their tender leaves to gaily dance in the Summer breeze, 'till the angry blast of the

loud north wind shall blow, then the trembling leaves will die and fall in the forest. And the cold north wind shall wail and send forth snow to bury them. Perhaps it shall mourn many Winters, yet I will come back and you will hear my call." Then she fondly embraced me and we parted.

I stood and watched her 'till she reached a point where she had to turn at right angles to reach a red river cart road which led to the reservation. Before disappearing between two aspen groves she turned around and waved me a last farewell and in a few minutes sent me three calls, and I responded. That was the last time I ever saw Silver Cloud or heard her voice. When she disappeared through the woods a deep sense of loneliness fell upon me and stayed with me until I reached home.

For many years afterwards when herding my father's flocks several times I thought I heard Silver Cloud's call, but when I responded it turned out to be a lost prairie chicken calling for a signal to join its flock. As the years rolled on many times I wondered what happened to Silver Cloud, for she was so sincere I knew if it were within her power she would come to see me.

It was just twenty years after I last saw her that I decided to take a trip to Chief Piapot's camp to try to find out what happened to her. It was at a time I was engaged in a general store business in the town of Balgonie, Saskatchewan. I was accompanied by Dr. Kalbfleish, who was the physician appointed by the Canadian government to look after the medical welfare of Chief Piapot's band. We made the trip in the doctor's new rubber tired buggy drawn by his span of white faced sorrels. Before we arrived at Chief Piapot's camp I requested of the doctor that he ask Chief Piapot if he remembered the stone tepee close to his Wolseley reservation and then to ask him if he remembered Pale Face Jumping Deer.

When we approached Piapot's camp we drove direct to his lodge and found him resting in his tepee. When he saw the doctor he came to the portal. I stood behind the doctor and a little to one side so that I could perceive the expression on Piapot's face. When the doctor asked him if he remembered the stone tepee close to his Wolseley reservation, he hesitated a moment then nodded his head and said he did. Then the doctor asked him

if he remembered Pale Face Jumping Deer. He smiled and said he did. The doctor said "This is Pale Face Jumping Deer. He has come to see you." Piapot gave me a cordial welcome.

Twenty years had made a great change in his appearance and he was becoming very frail.

While the doctor was attending to his patients, I talked quite a while with Piapot. The first question I asked him was, "Is Grey Eagle and his family in camp?" He shook his head several times, then said "No, Grey Eagle dead many Summers." Then he told me about a year after he left the government reservation another evil spirit entered his camp and brought a bad fever that killed many of his people, including Grey Eagle and all of his family. A look of sadness passed over his face when he told me, and I too felt deep sorrow surge within my breast.

While the doctor was attending to the medical wants of his many patients I walked about trying to locate some of the Indian boys with whom I had played in the years 1883 and 1884. But although I made much inquiry there were none to be found in camp at that time.

To this very day enduring scenes and sweet recollections of those childhood years, gleam bright on memory's wall, and ever will, 'till the last fleeting breath and faltering heartbeat are stilled forever.

To Silver Cloud

Oh, Prairie Queen, on memory's wall
Hang treasured scenes; I oft recall
Bright scenes that waken bygone days
That passing time shall not erase;
Sweet innocence of childhood years,
Boyhood joys, oft stained in tears.
Until bleak winter snow was falling.
I listened oft to hear you calling
And knew not that thy soul had fled
To that fair land of yours. You said
O'er mountain peaks of emerald green
Bright azure skies were ever seen;
There lovely birds are ever singing
Among the bloom, on rushes clinging.
The silvery sweetness of their song
Resounding through the Heavens long;
'Till magic spell of song and chatter
Blend their mellow notes to water
Through flowery moss. You said it ran
And gently dripped, 'till brooks began.
Then on their limpid feet, and singing,
Brooklets leap to canyons ringing
As sweet they sang, and water poured;
The swelling canyons louder roared
And waters dash from shore to shore;
Along their rough and rocky floor
Angry waves break high and leaping
Toss their spray on ivy creeping.
Forest loud with mirth and chatter
Blend their echoes with the water;
Where the rivers bright are dancing
The canyon waters keep advancing;

And plunge into the rivers creeping
By the willows drooped and weeping;
Then flowing 'neath entangled bowers
Laden with sweet scented flowers
There limpid lakes of silver sheen
Glimmer through the gaping green,
Where the bison herds are browsing
Countless water fowl keep rousing
And nature sweetly smiles her best,
While the suns gleam East and West.
Through the rushes softly glancing
On bright ripplets gently dancing,
And there in water deep and gleaming
Glint of trout and fairly teeming,
And your lovely birds keep singing
Sending forth the echoes ringing.

Oh, Prairie Queen, if you are there,
Then call me to your land so fair;
Again we'll romp with childish glee
Among the wild woods, you and me,
Through sunny glade and shady bowers
We'll roam unmindful of the hours,
And where the brightest bloom is seen
Gaily creep the woodland green
To pick the sweetest scented flowers
'Neath the drooping willow bowers.
And where the thorny stem bush grows
I'll pluck for you the reddest rose,
Then fondly weave it in your hair
Again, and sheath my arrows there,
Sweet Prairie Queen.



